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On Some Counter-Examples to the Guise of the Good –Thesis:

Intelligibility without Desirability

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Abstract: This paper argues that there are cases, which various guise of the good-theses concerning desires, intentions and actions would not allow. In these cases the agent acts for considerations that the agent does not regard as good reasons. The considerations render the actions intelligible but not desirable (where desirability and intelligibility can be objective or subjective). These cases are atypical, but nonetheless show that those guise of the good-theses which do not allow them, should be revised. In typical cases the intelligibility of desires, intentions and actions co-varies with their desirability: there are both unintelligible cases without suitable desirability characteristics and cases where desirability characteristics make the desire, intention and action intelligible. The claim here is that there are further more atypical and puzzling, but equally possible cases, where intelligibility and desirability come apart.

The paper first introduces the Guise of the Good - debates about desires, intentions, and actions, and suggests distinguishing the category of "acting for a reason" from "acting for a consideration not taken to be a reason". It then argues that while desirability entails intelligibility, and lack of intelligibility entails lack of desirability, these two cases leave conceptual room for a third category, which is that of intelligibility without desirability. This is so, whether we examine objective or subjective intelligibility and desirability. The claim is meant to apply mutatis mutandis to characteristics of desires, intentions and actions. The paper then provides possible cases of intelligibility without desirability, and defends the view against some objections.

This paper argues that there are cases, which various guise of the good-theses concerning desires, intentions and actions would not allow. In these cases the agent acts for considerations that the agent does not regard as good reasons. The considerations render the actions intelligible but not desirable (whether we understand desirability and intelligibility objectively or subjectively). These cases are atypical, but nonetheless show that those guise of the good-theses which do not allow them, should be revised. In typical cases the intelligibility of desires, intentions and actions co-varies with their desirability: there are both unintelligible cases without suitable desirability characteristics and then cases where desirability characteristics make the desire, intention and action intelligible. The claim here is that in addition to such typical unhappy and happy cases, there are more atypical and puzzling, but equally possible cases, where intelligibility and desirability come apart.

The claim is meant to apply to desires, intentions and actions. The paper grants that in the happy cases, desires, intentions, and actions involve cognition of (what for the agent seem to be good) reasons for desires, intentions, and actions, which are based on the desirability characteristics of what is desired, intended or done. And in typical unhappy cases, the desires, intentions, and actions strike the agent as unintelligible and lacking desirability characteristics. Nonetheless there are atypical cases where the desires, intentions, or actions remain (even for the agent) intelligible while the agent judges that the intelligibility characteristics are not valid desirability characteristics, as they do not give (what for the agent seem to be good) reasons for desires, intentions, and actions.

Section 1.1. introduces the Guise of the Good - debates about desires, intentions, and actions, and 1.2. introduces two terminological stipulations, distinguishing the category of "acting for a reason" from "acting for a consideration not taken to be a reason", and clarifying the relationship between the desirability and intelligibility of an action, intention, or desire, and the characterizations that render the action, intention, or desire intelligible.

Section 2.1. argues that desirability entails intelligibility, lack of intelligibility entails lack of desirability, but that these two cases leave conceptual room for a third category, which is that of intelligibility without desirability. This is so, whether we examine objective or subjective intelligibility and desirability. Section 2.2. clarifies how the claim is meant to apply mutatis mutandis to characteristics of desires, intentions and actions. Section 2.3. argues that there are cases that fall into the conceptual room outlined in 2.1.

Section 3.1.argues that the cases of intelligibility without desirability need not be cases of conceptual confusion, and section 3.2. argues that the view defended here is novel in comparison to slighly similar claims made by Alan Millar and Michael Stocker. 3.3. briefly restates the main conclusion, which is that the elevant cases of intelligibility without desirability should not be neglected in the guise of the good – debates.

1 The Guise of the Good -debates

1.1. A Debate about Desires, Intentions and Actions: The Guise of the Good

This paper aims to provide new kinds of counter-examples to (some versions of) the guise of the good –theses about desires, intentions, and actions.

The Classical View on the guise of the good has linked intelligibility and desirability very closely. The view goes back to authors such as Plato and Aristotle, and the debate was revived by Elizabeth Anscombe[1].

One strand of the debate have focused on *desires* and their relations to the agent's conception of the good, such as Gary Watson's discussion on value and desire[2], Michael Stocker's "Desiring the bad" [3], David Velleman's "Guise of the good"[4], Jennifer Hawkins's "Desiring the bad under the guise of the good"[5] and Boyle and Lavin's "Goodness and desire"[6]. Many views hold that desires are seemings (Stampe 1987) or appearances (Tenenbaum 2007) or experiences (Oddie 2005) of the good (see also Gendler's discussion of "aliefs"[7]). Some critics of the GG thesis hold that there is no necessary connection between desiring something and holding it good: one can intelligibly desire the bad.

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[1] E. Anscombe (1963) *Intention*,

[2] Gary Watson (1975) presents a case in which a squash player feels the urge to smash his racket against his winning opponent. One might have this kind of urge even if one does not believe there is any value to smashing an opponent with a racket.

[3] M. Stocker, "Desiring the Bad: an Essay in Moral Psychology", *Journal of Philosophy*, 76 (1979) pp. 738-53. See also Stocker (2004, 304) on Joseph Raz: "I certainly disagree with one of his general claims, since I hold, and he denies, that we can intelligibly desire the bad."

[4] D. Velleman, 'The Guise of the Good', *Noûs*, 26 (1992) pp. 3-26.

[5] Jennifer Hawkins "Desiring the bad under the guise of the good", *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 58, No. 231, April 2008, 244-264.

[6] Boyle, Matthew and Douglas Lavin. 2010. Goodness and desire. In *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum. New York: Oxford University Press.

[7] Gendler 2008.

The other strand of the debate focuses on *intentions and intentional action.*[8] For example Joseph Raz writes that the GG thesis, *concerning intentions, and actions performed with independent intentions*, consists of three propositions: (1) Actions performed with an independent intention are actions performed for reasons, as those are seen by the agents[9]; (2) Specifying the intention which makes an action intentional identifies central features of the reason(s) for which the action is performed[10]; (3) Reasons for action are such reasons by being facts which establish that the action has some value[11]. From these, it is said to follow that (4) Intentional actions are actions taken in, and because of, a belief that there is some good in them. This strand may acknowledge that we do have (intelligible) desires for the bad, but in forming an intention and acting, we actively decide to pursue the end, and thereby we must have seen something good in the end, or otherwise our intention or action is unintelligible.

This paper is relevant to both strands. It argues against any versions of the guise of the good – thesis, that link the intelligibility of desires, intentions, and actions (too) closely with their desirability.

Linking intelligibility and desirability is pervasive in the debates. Here are just some quotes: Stocker (2004, 303), notes that "according to the classical view, if there is no good in doing [a deed], there is no reason to do it, and thus, it cannot be done for a reason, and only what is done for a reason is intelligible." Quinn (1993) in the same vain contrasts between what it is like to act because one sees something good about the action, and simply finding oneself with an unintelligible urge. The latter type of action is mechanical and alien. And Hawkins (2008, 247) explains: "In virtue of the particular way a desired object enters awareness, action based on desire *makes sense*, in a way in which action based on the urges Quinn describes does not. This all too familiar feature of mental life needs to be accounted for. Describing desire as an evaluative state, one in which the desired object *appears good*, seems to offer the right kind of explanation. After all, *pursuing something that strikes one as good has a kind of internal intelligibility*." (italics added).

Joseph Raz (1999, 24) has characterized the debate centrally in terms of intelligibility:

> "typical intentional actions are actions about which their agents have *a story to tell* (i.e. actions manifesting an internal viewpoint about what one is doing, or is about to do), a story *which explains why one acted as one did*….It is a story which shows *what about the situation or the action made it, the action, an intelligible object of choice for the agent,* given who he is and how he saw things at the time."(italics added).

In Raz's view, the distinction between the defenders and critics of the guise of the good – thesis boils down to the connection between intelligibility and goodness. The critics argue that the GG-thesis "confuses the features, which make an action an *intelligible* object of choice with what might make it a *good* action. True, what makes it good also makes its choice intelligible. But good-making features are just one kind of feature capable of explaining the eligibility of actions, that is their possible attraction for an agent."(ibid.) And the critics then argues that "that an action is hurtful

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[8] Including discussions on *expressive action,* e.g. Hursthouse 1991.

[9] Note that Anscombe's version of (1) was slightly broader, stating that the question about reasons always applies to actions, sometimes the answer being "for no reason".

[10] A rival view concerning (2) is that intention specifies the end or goal of the action, and thus the satisfaction conditions of the action, and thus are needed in telling which attempts have been satisfactory and which not. Yet, the rival view continues, the action so specified can be done for rival reasons. Say, one can save a person from drowning for selfish or unselfish motivations. (The debate on this then turns on rival action-descriptions. See Anscombe 1963, Davidson 1980.

[11] Of these, (3) divides theorists roughly into those who hold that desires are or provide reasons (which are desire-belief-pairs as with Davidson), and those who hold that it is not desires, but desirability or value that is relevant.

does not make it good, but it makes it intelligible by making its appeal to some agents intelligible." (ibid., 25)[12]

So far we can follow Raz's characterization of the parties to the debate. The following characterization needs to be revised, however, to make conceptual room for the possibility discussed in this paper. Raz continues (presenting the objection the GG):

> "Once we draw *a clear distinction between features which show an act to be an intelligible object of choice and ones which show it to be good or of value we will see, the objection continues, that reasons belong with the first, and not with the second*. People will acknowledge, or brag, that they did something because it would hurt X, or because it was against all the rules. These are often their openly avowed reasons. And that is how it should be, for reasons are those considerations which make the act eligible from the point of view of the agent, and not necessarily those which make it good."(ibid.).

This paper does not contribute to the debate so defined. Rather, it drives a wedge in a different place: it asks whether there are "considerations" (or in Raz's words "stories") that can be cited to make the action and its appeal intelligible while not normatively favoured. They differ from more full-fledged "considerations" that are taken to give reasons for the action and make the action good in some respects, on the one hand, and from considerations that do not succeed in making the action intelligible.

The counter-examples to GG discussed in this paper are actions for considerations that are, admittedly, not good *reasons* (for the agent), but which nonetheless make the action appealing, intelligible to the agent.

1.2. Two terminological stipulations

For shedding light on the conceptual possibility of intelligibility and desirability coming apart, it is helpful to introduce two terminological distinctions. The first concerns the notion of a "reason for". There are three standard usages of it.[13] The first is causal-explanatory use, that can apply to non-agents: "The reason why the snowman melted was…". The second is that of a normative reason, which (objectively) speaks in favour of an action (or other responses such as desires, intentions, emotions, beliefs): p is a reason for A to φ. Normatively relevant features give reasons for actions, and together they determine what one overall ought to do. The notion of a "motivating reason" stands for the reason for which the agent in fact acted. It can be mistaken factually (p might not be the case, although the agent acted on the assumption that p), or normatively (p does not favour φ-ing, although the agent thought so).

The stipulation is to distinguish a motivating reason and a (mere) motivating consideration. We can continue to call a "motivating *reason*" the consideration that the agent took to be a good normative reason, and which the agent acted on. In happy cases, motivating reasons are identical with normative reasons, in unhappy cases the agent is mistaken about them. A "(mere) motivating *consideration*" is one that the agents did not even take to be a good normative reason, but acted on it anyway; typically knowing fully well one shouldn't. Importantly, this is not a mere causal-explanatory "reason why", and does not apply to snowmen melting. It requires the same

[12] Raz adds: "Another example: that one has a duty to perform an action is a reason to perform it, which also shows it to be good, at least in some respect. But that an action will violate one's duty, or that it will break all the norms, also makes it an intelligible object of choice."(ibid.). "people do what they do precisely because it is the wrong thing to do, because it is the anomic choice."

[13] See Dancy 2000.

psychological capacity of acting in light of a consideration, as acting for a motivating reason does, the only difference is that the agent does not think the consideration normatively favours the action.

In the debates on practical reason acting for such considerations is typically called "acting for a reason", whether or not the agent regards the considerations to be good reasons. For most purposes this does not matter. To call such considerations "reasons" is otherwise appropriate, but there is a danger of creating an appearance of a conceptual confusion on part of the agent, where there may only be substantively criticizable action and psychological complexity. In this paper, "acting for a reason" will mean that the agent took the consideration to speak in favour of the action and be a good reason to act; and if not, the agent did not act for a reason, but for a mere motivating consoderaton.

Another terminological distinction we can draw is that between "desirability characterizations" and "(mere) intelligibility characterizations". In the cases of acting, desiring and intending for a reason, the features that are the reasons are characterizations which speak in favour of the desire, intention or action, and which make them desirable (and not merely desired). Such characteristics make the desires, intentions, and actions intelligible. But even in cases, where the agent acts, desires or intends for mere motivating considerations, and does not regard the actions, desire or intention genuinely desirable or favoured by desirability characteristics, the (mere) motivating considerations may make the desire, intention, or action intelligible – and in such cases the considerations can be called "(mere) intelligibilility characterizations". If such cases are to be found, in them the intelligibility characterizations can explain why something was understandably desired, without being (taken to be) objectively desirable. Or so this paper will claim.

The terminological distinction between desirability and (mere) intelligibility characterizations and between motivating reasons and (mere) motivating considerations will be equally helpful for the critics of this paper – these distinctions can be used both in defending and criticizing the claim.

2. Desirability characteristics make desires intelligible, but might other features do so as well?

2.1 Desirability entails intelligibility, lack of intelligibility entails lack of desirability

In this section we introduce the conceptual possibility of intelligibility without desirability with reference to desires, and the next section clarifies how it applies *mutatis mutandis* to intentions and actions.

A desire can be intelligible thanks to the desirable characteristics of its objects (or of its contents, or perhaps of the very state of desiring that content)[14]. It is intelligible to want to eat ice-cream, as eating it would be a pleasant experience. The characteristic that it tastes good contributes to making ice-cream desirable.

Indeed, here we can accept that such desirability characteristics always make desires intelligible, when they make the content desirable. We can further assume that the desirability characteristics of the contents are what give normative reasons for desires, and that it is the balance of normative reasons for and against that make the desire justified.[15]

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[14] Anscombe's view (in Intention, §38) is that concerning desires, "the question 'What do you want that for?' arises—until at last we reach the desirability characterization, about which 'What do you want that for?' does not arise, or if it is asked has not the same point."

[15] The rival Humean view (that Anscombe argues against) is that desiring is not responsive to any features, but rather the starting point: anything can equally well be desired, and what is de facto desired provides (with suitable beliefs) reasons for intentions and actions.

We can also accept that unintelligible desires lack desirability characteristics. They lack features that would serve as reasons for having that desire (and as reasons for judging that the content is desirable). The examples familiar from philosophical literature include "wanting a saucer of mud" (Anscombe)[16] or desiring to drink a cup of paint (Davidson).[17]

There is also phenomenological support for the view, that some desires may strike the agents as worthless, but nonetheless a state of motivatedness can be brought about. These states may but need not be compulsive. From the mere fact that something is desired, one cannot conclude that the agent endorses the view that the desire is intelligible: the agent may be alienated from the state of motivation, and regard the desire as unintelligible.

These two claims have been contested, but I will simply grant these theses here: desirability entails intelligibility, lack of intelligibility entails lack of desirability.

My aim is to point out that these two views leave conceptual room for cases, where the characteristics of the contents of the desire do not make it justified, do not speak in favour of having the desire, but nonetheless make the desire intelligible.

This is so whether we think of desirability and intelligibility in objective or subjective terms. By "objective" I here refer to how things are, not just how the agent takes them to be; and "subjective" depends on the agent's takes.

In the *objective "intelligibility without desirability" cases* the (objective) characteristics of the contents of the desire do not make it (objectively) justified, do not (objectively) speak in favour of having the desire, but nonetheless make the desire (objectively) intelligible.

In the *subjective "intelligibility without desirability" –cases*, the characteristics (as the agent sees them) of the contents of the desire do not make it (in the agent's best judgement) justified, do not (as the agent judges the case) speak in favour of having the desire, but nonetheless make the desire intelligible (for the agent).

The objective and subjective cases are connected. The objective cases of the first sort are at the same time cases of the second sort, if the agent is clear-sighted and the agent's conceptions correspond to the objective shape of the situation. But if the agent is mistaken in some of its assessments of the situation, there can be subjective "intelligibility without desirability" – judgements even when it is not objectively an "intelligibility without desirability" – case. In the debates on the guise of the good – thesis, it is especially the subjective "intelligibility without desirability"- judgements that should not be ignored. For other theoretical purposes, the objective cases may be equally relevant.

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[16] "But is not anything wantable … ? It will be instructive to anyone who thinks this to approach someone and say: 'I want a saucer of mud' … He is likely to be asked what for; to which let him reply that he does not want it for anything, he just wants it …Would he [the other man] not try to find out in what aspect the object desired is desirable? … Now if the reply is: 'Philosophers have taught us that anything can be the object of desire; … it merely so happens that I want [it],' then this is fair nonsense." (Anscombe 2000, 70–1)

[17] Tenenbaum (2013) adds other examples: counting blades of grass (Raz 1996), drinking coffee for the love of Sophocles (Raz 1999), being simply disposed to turn on radios (Quinn 1993). I will return to these when discussing whether desires are reasons for action.

2.2. Reasons for desires, intentions, and actions

What section 2.1 claimed about desires, can *mutatis mutandis* said about intentions and actions. The very same considerations (e.g. that ice-cream tastes good) can be a reason to desire to eat ice-cream, to intend to eat ice-cream, and to eat ice-cream.

We need not dwell here on the differences between reasons to desire, intend, and act in much detail. A general comment suffices: A single desirability characteristic, on its own, can provide *one* reason to desire something. Typically things are more or less desirable depending on the constellation of plural characteristics, giving reasons for and against desiring.[18]

To resolve to do something, to form an intention to do it, may require stronger reasons: to have sufficient reason to intend is to have stronger reasons for than against forming the intention. It may be rational both to desire to do something and desire not to do it, whereas it is not rational to both intend to do something and intend not to do it.

Intentions typically are general plans to be further specified in action[19]. Thus, in addition to the reasons for forming the intention, there are reasons for and against any particular *way* of realizing the intention in action in specific time and place. Thus, it may well be that a desirability characteristic provides a sufficient reason to desire and intend to do something, but not a sufficient reason to act (say, because there are stronger reasons against any of the available ways and means of realizing the intention here and now).

Despite these differences in reasons for desiring, intending and acting, we can here focus on cases of characteristics which in principle function at the same time as reasons to desire, intend and act, such as the one mentioned above: that ice-cream tastes good can be a reason to desire, to intend, and to act. The category of "intelligibility without desirability" will in principle concern desires, intentions, and actions.

2.3. Intelligibility without desirability: the cases[20]

This section will argue that there are possible cases of intelligibility without desirability, and so the conceptual room suggested in the previous sections is not empty. There are possible cases of intentions, actions and desires that fit the description. The cases need not concern acting, intending or desiring under the "guise of the bad", but cases of silenced reasons can illustrate the category.

Unlike an *overridden* consideration which remains nonetheless a good normative reason in the situation, a *silenced* consideration is not a good normative reason. A silenced consideration has an intelligible connection to the action performed, it belongs to a type of consideration that typically speaks in favour of the type of action. Nonetheless, in the context, it is silenced or "disabled" and does not in that situation speak in favour of the action.[21] I will here assume that the phenomenon of silencing or disabling is both an objective relation between considerations "in the world" and can be judged and known by the moral agent, and be a subjective consideration as well. Just like agents

[18] See e.g. Dancy 2004.
[19] Bratman 1987
[20] One usual case of someone desiring, intending, or acting in a way we can "understand" while not regard "justified" is that of normative disagreement, where the agent desires, intends or acts in accordance with *her* judgements about what is justified. As a bystander, I can often regard that agent as not desiring, intending or doing what is justified (as I think there is some mistake in her judgement), and nonetheless understandable (after all, she desired, intended and did what she thought best – what could be more understandable?). Such cases of normative disagreement will be put to one side for the rest of this essay.
[21] McDowell 1979, Dancy 2004.

can judge that something is a reason for an action, and get things right or wrong in doing so, the agents can judge that some would-be reason is silenced or disabled, and can get things right or wrong in doing so. Mutatis mutandis, the discussion is meant to apply to desires, intentions, and actions.

Let us discuss this with reference to a pair of initial cases (*Ollie vs Stan in a burning building*), and add four further contrast cases (*Pierre vs Xavier*; *Watson's squash player's desire; switching card games; Jim and Jill 1 and 2)*; when the discussion advances.[22]

> *Ollie in a burning building:* Ollie is in a burning building. He is in danger. He could flee. His family is also in the building and in danger. Ollie could try to save his family. Ollie thinks that "in this situation, the danger is a reason for me to flee, but it is overridden". Ollie flees however, and the reason that motivates him to flee is that he is in danger.[23]
>
> *Stan in a burning building:* Stan is in a burning building. He is in danger. He could flee. His family is also in the building and in danger. Stan could try to save his family. Stan thinks that "in this situation, the danger is not a reason for me to flee, it is normatively silenced". Stan flees however, and the consideration that motivates him to flee is that he is in danger.

Ollie acts akratically for a reason that he thinks is overridden by the stronger reason to help his family. Danger, for Ollie, is a motivating reason, albeit an overridden one. The judged desirability of safety makes his action, for Ollie, intelligible, although not justified. Leaving aside whether or not Ollie's judgements get things right in this case, there will be other cases with such a mix of akratic action, overriding, desirability and intelligibility.

Stan, by contrast, explicitly judges that he does not have a good reason to flee. What otherwise would be a good reason to flee (that he is in danger) is in this situation silenced. I will use the terminology of a "motivating consideration" to refer to such cases, where the agent does not regard the consideration a good reason at all in the situation – so it is not a "motivating reason" strictly speaking.[24] I will not call this a case of "akrasia" (I reserve that term for cases where the consideration has been overridden – nothing hangs here on whether the term "akrasia" should be extended to the cases under discussion).

The suggestion, then, is that Stan's action is a case of "intelligibility without desirability".

Because the motivating consideration is (judged to be) normatively void, it does not function as a desirability characterization for the intention or action (let us discuss below whether the

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[22] The case comes from Kieran Setiya (2010, p.90) who writes that "the danger is not a reason for me to flee", but it is nonetheless a consideration "for which I am doing so". Setiya uses the phrase "the reason for which I flee". As I explain below, I would prefer "the motivating consideration for which I flee", as the agent does not consider the consideration to be a reason for fleeing.

[23] Another usual case of someone (desiring, intending or) acting in a way we can "understand" while not regard "justified" – even in the absence of normative disagreement – is that of non-radical akrasia. That is the case where the agent has some genuine reasons (that render the desire, intention or action understandable) which do not suffice to justify overall the action (or desire or intention) because they are, in the situation, overridden. That case is no great puzzle for understanding, and does not threaten the "guise of the good" – thesis: what the agent acts on (desires, intends) is regarded by the agent as a good reason, although somewhat akratically she violates her overall judgement what to do (or desire or intend). Such cases will not be central for this paper.

[24] The agent's attitude is rather that "I did not have *any* reason to do it; that I did get some benefit was a silenced consideration. A virtuous agent would not have acted on such a consideration."

consideration is nonetheless a reason for desiring, even if it is silenced as a reason for intending and acting; to anticipate, I will argue that there can be both kinds of cases). So it can be a candidate case of "intelligibility without desirability" at least in the respect, that it is a case of action (or intention) which is not desirable.

Is it intelligible however that the agent nonetheless acts on the consideration? This is a case of "acting for a (mere) motivating consideration" (in the stipulated sense), as opposed to motivating reason, if the agent thinks that as one's family is still in the house, the consideration that one can save oneself is normatively silenced and is not a reason. Arguably, acting on such a consideration can be intelligible for the agent, and for interpreters. These cases are unlike unintelligible urges. The claim has two parts: (i) It is intelligible, although not virtuous or justified, to be motivated (i.e. to form a desire) by a salient consideration that typically is a reason. It is understandable, even though it is normatively silenced in this case. (ii) And it is intelligible to intend and to act on one's motivation, even though a more virtuous agent would not act on the motivation unless it deserves to be acted on (a fully virtuous agent would not even have the motivation[25]). The link between being motivated to do something and doing it is inherently an intelligible one.

How does this differ from unintelligible urges? Take two other cases:

> *Pierre in a burning building.* Pierre is in a burning building. He is in danger. He could flee. His family is also in the building and in danger. Pierre could try to save his family. Pierre thinks that "in this situation, the danger is not a reason for me to flee, it is normatively silenced". Pierre further thinks that life will become a nightmare, pure anguish, existentially unbearable, and he will not be able to sleep well ever again, if he flees. Pierre flees however, and the consideration that motivates him to flee is that he is in danger.

The more we add such qualifications that distinguish Stan's and Pierre's cases, the closer we come to the borderline, behind which the motivation to flee is not experienced as intelligible any more: is it understandable that one would voluntarily choose such anguish?

> *Xavier painting a house.* Xavier is painting a house. He likes the music of Sibelius. He paints the wall red. Xavier thinks that "the fact that I like the music of Sibelius is not even apparently reason for me to paint the wall red". Yet, the motivating consideration that makes him paint the wall red is that he likes the music of Sibelius.

Here we have a clear-cut case of an *unintelligible* motivation. Liking Sibelius does not give even an apparent reason to paint the wall red. To act on an unintelligible motivation can be an alienated experience.[26] The suggestion here is that Stan's case is not unintelligible in this way, as the consideration would in another situation be a perfectly good reason for action.[27]

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[25] See McDowell 1979.

[26] Quinn (1993) in the same vain contrasted between what it is like to act because one sees something good about the action, and simply finding oneself with an unintelligible urge. The latter type of action is mechanical and alien (See Quinn 1993, Hawkins 2008). As Hawkins (2008, 247) explains: "In virtue of the particular way a desired object enters awareness, action based on desire *makes sense*, in a way in which action based on the urges Quinn describes does not. This all too familiar feature of mental life needs to be accounted for. Describing desire as an evaluative state, one in which the desired object *appears good*, seems to offer the right kind of explanation. After all, *pursuing something that strikes one as good has a kind of internal intelligibility*." (italics added).

[27] Unintelligible desires and pursuits: The agent acts for what he or she finds an unintelligible motivation, which he or she does not regard as a normative reason; the action strikes him or her as worthless.

Supposing then that Stan's case is not unintelligible in this way – does it show that the action is desirable after all? Is there not something (taken to be) good, of value, in the outcome, for example that the agent survives? In a sense, yes. What is at stake is being guided by a consideration that one takes to be a *normatively* void consideration, invalid "reason". It need not be pursuing what one takes to be *evaluatively* 'bad'. As we saw, the agent's attitude is rather that "I did not have *any* reason to do it; that I did get some benefit was a silenced consideration. A virtuous agent would not have acted on such a consideration." There is a difference between Stan's case and Ollie's case, and whether or not Stan's case is intelligible, it is a case where the action (as the agent sees it) lacks any desirability.

We are interested in the conceptual coherence of the scenario where the consideration is silenced, and yet the agent intelligibly acts on it. Stan's case fits the bill. The conceptual room is created by driving a wedge between intelligibility and desirability. Stan acts for a consideration that suffices to make the action intelligible while not providing a normative reason for it.

An objection against the very possibility of this category would be that whenever one intentionally does something, there must be some consideration that explains why the agent did it rather than not, and thus the agent must have thought that something speaks in favour it. That is, "you did it, so you are committed to the view that something spoke in favour of it"? But that is exactly the issue under contestation: perhaps some consideration may make the choice and desire intelligible even though the agent regards it as not reason-giving. After all, one may well contest the necessity of "you did it, so you are committed to the view that one ought overall to do it in these circumstances", as the agent may have acted akratically for an overridden reason. Similarly then, one may contest "you did it, so you are committed to the view that there was a reason to do it in these circumstances", as the agent may have acted for a silenced reason.[28] While fully virtuous agents always act as they know they ought to, many of us seem to act in ways we overall ought not (often for very understandable reasons).

Other cases in which one experiences a mere motivating consideration that is not a motivating reason could be Gary Watson's (1975) well-known cases of a desire to smash one's annoying opponent with a squash racket. One may have the desire even when one sees no justification for it, or no value in it (and if so, it is a counter-example to the guise of the good-thesis concerning desires).

> *A squash player's desire:* A squash player is annoyed by his opponent and has a sudden desire to hit the opponent with his racket. The player sees no value in hitting the opponent, and thinks there is no normative reason to do so. The player experiences the desire as intelligent, as hitting would express one's state of being annoyed, but at the same time experiences the desire as normatively silenced: hitting an opponent is not an action supported at all by one's state of being annoyed. It is not merely overridden by the moral consideration that one should not hit one's opponents, it is silenced by it.

Here, there is an intelligible state of being motivated, that is, a state of desiring, combined with a state of thinking there are no reasons for that state.[29]

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[28] Alternatively, one may acknowledge that such a *commitment* is at place, while thinking that one did not meet the commitment (that is, acknowledging that one acted akratically or for a consideration that was no reason).

[29] Humeans of course would say that there are no reasons for intrinsic desires, but the more Aristotelean view we operate with here would say that there are reasons for appropriate desires, and that unintelligible desires are unsupported by reasons. And this paper adds that the Aristotelean view should have conceptual room for cases of intelligible motivation while reasons (or desirability characterizations) are silenced.

A critic of this paper's suggestion may again ask that if the squash-player does not value the desired end, are the desires not unintelligible? Well, they are not unintelligible in the way that the totally unrelated responses would be. Many responses are simply unrelated to the considerations (say painting the wall green because one's annoying squash-opponent keeps winning), whereas some are related (wanting to hit the opponent who keeps winning; congratulating the opponent who keeps winning).[30] Both good and bad options may appear intelligible and made salient and tempting by features of the circumstances. And in some cases, these options may further be (and be thought by the agent to be) normatively silenced. When they have the two features of making the action intelligible, but being normatively silenced, they fall into the category of cases we are interested in, that of "intelligibility without desirability". These cases are just further illustrations of the conceptual room for cases of "intelligibility without desirability", this time applied to desires (whereas the initial examples concerned actions and intentions).

A different kind of case would be that of acting on conditional principles, whose conditions are not met. Here the case is less of a "silenced" reason strictly speaking. If it turns out that these cases do not actually constitute cases of "intelligibility without desirability", then they naturally do not provide further support to the thesis of this paper, but arguably they can constitute another variant of such cases.

Often cases of acting, intending or desiring something when the condition for its desirability or normativity is not met, are (unnoticed) mistakes, and one acts for what one mistakenly regards as good reasons (and thus do not interest us here as there is assumed desirability). But one may also acknowledge that the condition is not met, and desire or intend or act nonetheless. The following serves to illustrate a possibility that in a changed situation one still retains perceptions of saliences from a previous situation, and acts on such perceptions. If acting on one's perception of significances is inherently understandable (even in cases where one reflectively knows the perceptions are out of place in the changed situation), these cases are cases of intelligibility without desirability:

> *Switching card-games.* You and I are playing cards. We have first played poker, where cards with higher numbers, or cards from the same suit, are significant and salient for the players. We then switch to playing some other game, where aces are not any better than other cards, and it is irrelevant whether cards are of the same suit. Nonetheless, these features may remain salient for the player: given that we had played poker before, they intelligibly retain their salience, even though they make no normative difference in the new game. They may continue to affect our choices in the new game, make some cards our "favorites" as it were.

Cases like switching card-games can be cases of acting on an intelligible desire one does not think one genuinely has reason to act on, or that one does not hold genuinely desirable. More could be said about cases like this, here this case serves just as an additional possibility of highlighting the category of intelligibility without desirability.

As a final pair of cases let us discuss a case that has been used in a debate between Kieran Setiya and Joseph Raz, and provide a variant of it.

> *Jim and Jill.* Jill killed Jim. Three considerations are advanced as explanations: Jill did it because she was jealous of Jim. Jill did it because she felt a sudden rage; a sudden

[30] Cf. Hawkins's primitive 'evaluative impressions' on what makes sense.

> rush of blood to her head made her do it. Jill did it in order to inherit Jim's wealth, as she knew that she would after Jim's death.

About this case, Joseph Raz argues that only the last consideration ("in order to inherit") can provide a normative reason for the action. He argues that Kieran Setiya's theory is unable to draw the distinction between acting for considerations that can provide normative reasons, and ones that cannot. He writes: "while there can be a number of (compatible but distinct) explanations of every intentional action, there must be for every action performed with an independent intention at least one explanation which meets an additional condition: it must explain why the agent decided to perform the action, rather than resist the pull towards it. Of the three examples only the last, only the explanation via a normative reason, does that." (Raz, 2010, 126-7). Raz comments that "what marks actions done with independent intentions is that they are ones which their agents believe to have some value in them, agents have available to them explanations by reference to what they take to be normative reasons, namely explanations purporting to show that there is some good in the action." (*ibid.*)

If the claim of this paper is correct, this is slightly too narrow however for actions with independent intentions. There is conceptual room also for a fourth type of explanation in reference to considerations that the agents acknowledge do not make the action desirable, but which make the action intelligible.

> *Tim and Tilly.* Tilly killed Tim. Tim had wronged Tilly very badly, and Tilly hated Tim for that. Tilly did not do expect to feel joy or relief from killing him, in fact expected all sorts of negative feelings and consequences, but she just did hate Tim. She did not think there was any good normative reason to kill Tim (rather than reporting him to the police), but nonetheless Tilly has a story of why she decided to do it rather than resist the pull. What Tim had done made the hatred intelligible, created a temptation so strong, that giving in to the temptation is understandable, although not justified. The killing was an understandable expression of that hatred. The motivating considerations included the wronging that Tim had done. It can be the case that Tilly did not really see genuine value in her actions (no "desirability characterizations"), but did think the action had a point of getting even ("intelligibility characterizations").

If this is right, then one can provide a story explaining intelligibility without resort to (what the agent saw as) normative reasons. The category of explanation by appeal to mere motivating considerations is not reducible to the other three types of explanations. (Of course, in some other variant, we can stipulate that killer saw that as a desirability characterization and thought there was a normative reason, but it is not that variant of the story that we are interested in).

3 Further discussion

3.1. Conceptual confusion?

We can next ask whether there is conceptual confusion involved in (claiming there are cases of) acting for considerations one doesn't believe are reasons. (cf. Raz 2010, 125-129).

Normative and motivating reasons are in the happy cases identical (the very same consideration), so there is a conceptual connection. But they can come apart, there is no unintelligibility or conceptual confusion in acting for a consideration which is not in fact a reason; nor is it unintelligible that someone acts for an overridden or silenced reason. So it is hard to see why a *conceptual* confusion

would be at stake when one acts for a consideration one admits is not a normative reason; while of course one is substantively criticizable for doing so.

If acting intentionally is acting for a reason, there is no room for acting intentionally for a consideration that is not a reason. Could that be a decisive objection? But as already Anscombe suggested, intentional action is action to which the question ”why” in the special sense applies, including cases where the answer is ”for no reason”. These include cases of acting for no consideration at all, such as idle actions (such as doodling something with a pen while speaking on the phone) and expressive actions (actions that express one's state of mind, but are not done in order to express one's state of mind). The category of acting “for no reason” may also include habitual action, for example when the habit has lost its original point and the agent is not able to cite any consideration for why to act in accordance with the habit. But this paper suggests that in addition to such cases, there are also cases of acting for (mere) motivating considerations: acting for silenced reasons, or acting on conditional principles, when the conditions are not met. Further, one may in some cases know *what* one does independently of knowing *why* one does it. Thus there seems to be room for driving a wedge between intentional action and acting for a reason, without conceptual confusion.

3.2. Is this a novel view?

Has the “intelligibility without desirability” - view defended here been discussed before? I think it has not. For example such authors as Alan Millar and Michael Stocker, who in some respects come close, retain the idea that motivating considerations are reasons.

Alan Millar in *Understanding People* suggests that there can be intentional action directed at something that one in no way values; and suggests that the constitutive aim of action is not to be cashed out in terms of value, but 'having a point'.[31] Millar however links “having a point” to assumed normative reasons, thus not defending the “intelligibility without desirability” – view formulated here. For the classical view, actions have a point if there is something valuable or desirable in them, which speaks in favour of, or gives reasons to them, and actions are unintelligible otherwise. Millar suggests that actions may have a point which gives a reason to them, even while there is nothing valuable or desirable in them; but Millar does not consider the possibility whether there might be a point in acting for mere motivating considerations.

Similarly, Stocker defends the idea that reasons to do something bad are nonetheless taken as reasons.[32] Stocker's $\text{reason}_{\text{bad}}$ is taken to be a good normative reason to pursue bad ends. By

[31] “Defenders of the classical theory are committed to supposing that the end sought—hurting others, or drawing the attention of others—is conceived as being in some way good or at least as a means to some good. So far as I can see, nothing in logic, or experience of human conduct and feeling, requires this to be so. If the agent in some sense places a value on such ends, this amounts to no more than being drawn towards them. That the agent is thus drawn is compatible with his not being at that point in any way guided by considerations counting for and against the desirability of the ends.”(Millar 2004, 66). “A natural suggestion, then, is that the constitutive aim of intentional action is that the intended action should in one way or another have a point.”(Millar 2004, 67)

[32] “My overall aim here will be to show that what makes for intelligibility in action is being able to answer Anscombe's question, 'What do you want that for?' in a certain way. Raz holds that this way is, or includes, that, according to the agent's lights, it is good. I will argue that although sometimes that does provide a satisfactory answer, often it does not. I will also argue that citing what is bad or is seen as bad can sometimes suffice.”(Stocker 2004, 313). “So, I do not agree that all reasons, including $\text{reasons}_{\text{bad}}$, must have normative force in the sense of being aimed at the good. None the less, I think they can have normative force in other ways. Here are some of these ways. The person with that $\text{reason}_{\text{bad}}$ may regret, and think he deserves being chided or mocked for, not having the courage of his convictions when he acts against it or when he simply fails to act on it. Similarly, he may congratulate himself when, despite pressure to the contrary, he acts on it. He may, in this sense, show that he thinks the $\text{reason}_{\text{bad}}$ is to be acted on.”(Stocker 2004, 313)

contrast, this paper has been interested in cases of acting for considerations that are not taken to be normative reasons or have "normative force". Thus, both Millar and Stocker drive a wedge in a different place than this paper.

3.3. Is intelligibility at base a kind of desirability?

The thesis defended in this paper would collapse if intelligibility would at base be a kind of desirability.[33] This paper has assumed that the desirability of desires, intentions, and actions is a "thin" category dependent in each case on some characteristic that suffice to makes the desire, intention, or action desirable. In different cases the characteristic may be different, as there is a plurality of such characteristics, and so in different cases the thin feature of "being desirable" is grounded in a different feature.

The paper has assumed the same about intelligibility. It, too, depends on characteristics that may in different cases be different, and the thin feature of "being intelligible" is in different cases grounded on different intelligibility characteristics.

If desirability and intelligibility turn out to be the same feature, then of course this paper's central thesis collapses. But it would be a surprising finding if they turn out to be so. Analytically or conceptually, we can understand the difference between desiring and understanding, and thereby the difference between something being appropriately desired and something being graspable by understanding. A theory defending the identity of these features would have the burden of showing how they, despite appearances, turn out to be the same feature. This paper has merely assumed that the appearances are not misleading, and they are not the same feature.

But despite being different features, they might be coextensive. The central claim of this paper has been that the defenders and critics of the guise of the good – thesis, who unreflectively have assumed them to be coextensive have just not tried hard enough to see whether they might come apart. Section 2.1. granted that all desirability characteristics are at the same time intelligibility characteristic: same features can make the desire, intention, or action desirable and intelligible. Yet, there may be features (such as silenced reasons) that make the desire, intention, or action intelligible but not desirable.

One more possibility might be that the thin feature of intelligibility might in itself always suffice to make the desire, intention, or action desirable. That is a substantive claim, and can be tested in light of putative counter-examples. The cases in 2.3 are meant to be counter-examples: acting for a silenced reason is not desirable, despite being intelligible. If so, intelligibility does not always suffice for desirability.

3.4. Conclusion

While the defenders of the guise of the good – thesis may be right about the normal cases, this paper has tried to show that some actions or choices can be intelligible even when they are not desirable: it is understandable to act for silenced reasons, for conditional principles when the condition is not met, and for desires that one in no way values. Similarly, it can be intelligible to have intentions and desires in the absence of characterizations that make them desirable. It is possible to have intelligibility without desirability, in desires, intentions, and actions. This is so whether we interpret intelligibility and desirability objectively or subjectively.

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[33] I thank an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

The paper has also argued that in the subjective cases of intelligibility without desirability, the guise of the good – thesis does not hold.[34]

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